

Message Text

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PAGE 01 OTTAWA 00002 252250Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 /058 W
-----252327Z 113906 /73

P 252237Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2932
INFO AMCONSUL MONTREAL
ALL OTHER AMCONSULS CANADA (BY POUCH)

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 OTTAWA 02009

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: JOE CLARK AND PCS IN TROUBLE

REF: A) OTTAWA 2436; B) OTTAWA 1360; C) OTTAWA 1206

1. SUMMARY: JOE CLARK AND HIS PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE (PC) PARTY ARE IN DEEP ELECTORAL TROUBLE AS RECENT, DRAMATIC TURNAROUND IN POLLS DEMONSTRATE. TRUDEAU HAS STAKED OUT POSITION AS LEADER OF FEDERAL EFFORT TO KEEP CANADA TOGETHER AND ELECTORATE OBVIOUSLY RESPONDING POSITIVELY. CLARK WILL HAVE DIFFICULTY BREAKING INTO UNITY STRUGGLE PERSONIFIED BY TRUDEAU AND QUEBEC PREMIER LEVESQUE. SIGNS ALSO SUGGEST THAT CANADIAN VOTER WILL NOT TAKE CLARK SERIOUSLY AS POTENTIAL NATIONAL LEADER. IF INDEED IT IS "TAKE CHARGE" CHARISMA THEY WANT, CLARK DOES NOT HAVE IT. CLARK'S STRONG SUIT, ORGANIZATION, IS ONE POSITIVE SIGN IN GENERALLY BLEAK PICTURE. HIS YEAR OF VISITING AND ORGANIZING LOCAL CONSTITUENCIES REPORTEDLY HAS RESULTED IN STRONG LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS AND PROSPECT FOR GOOD CANDIDATES. ADDING PLUSSES AND MINUSES, HOWEVER, CLARK AND PCS ON DOWNSIDE AND SLIPPERY ONE AT THAT. END SUMMARY.

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2. PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE (PC) LEADER JOE CLARK HAD HIMSELF SAID FOR PAST YEAR THAT PC LEAD IN POLLS WAS INFLATED AND WOULD HAVE TO COME DOWN. BUT DRAMATIC REVERSAL IN HIS POPULARITY VERSUS PM TRUDEAU'S (REF B) AND HIS PARTY'S STANDING VERSUS THE LIBERALS (REF A) PRE-SUMABLY HAS CLARK AS STUNNED AS HIS CLOSE POLITICAL ADVISORS. HAVING SMUGLY PERCHED ON POLL RESULTS FOR LAST

YEAR, PC NATIONAL DIRECTOR JOHN LASCHINGER TOLD EMBOFF LAST WEEK THAT MOST RECENT PARTY VERSUS PARTY POLL MUST BE FLAWED IN SAMPLING AND HE WAS ONLY HALF JOKING. LASCHINGER COMMENT TELLING SINCE IT ILLUSTRATES BEWILDERMENT AT TURN OF EVENTS.

3. AS INDICATED IN REF B, IT GENERALLY BELIEVED THAT TWO BASIC FACTORS BEHIND TURNAROUND: VOTER FEELING THAT PM TRUDEAU MOST EFFECTIVE NATIONAL FIGURE TO LEAD FEDERALIST COUNTER TO THREAT OF QUEBEC SEPARATISM AND WIDESPREAD DOUBTS ABOUT CLARK LEADERSHIP QUALITIES. NEITHER CAUSE LEAVES ROOM FOR MUCH PC OPTIMISM. DESPITE OPPOSITION CRIES OF FOUL AND CHARGES THAT TRUDEAU IS USING NATIONAL CRISIS FOR PARTISAN POLITICAL PURPOSES, FACT IS THAT TRUDEAU HAS BECOME PERSONIFICATION OF FEDERALIST COUNTER TO QUEBEC SEPARATIST THREAT. AND POLL RESULTS SEEM TO INDICATE THAT CANADIAN VOTER FEELS COMFORTABLE WITH HIM IN THIS ROLE. NATURALLY, THIS COULD TURN ON TRUDEAU IF PARTI QUEBECOIS (PQ) FORCES APPEAR TO BE WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS OF UNCOMMITTED QUEBECOIS AND/OR TRUDEAU RESPONSE APPEARS STAGNANT. BUT TRUDEAU PERFORMANCES IN SPEECHES IN QUEBEC CITY AND IN WASHINGTON SUGGEST THAT HE HAS NO INTENTION OF LOSING HIS GRIP ON THIS ISSUE OR ON VOTER RESPONSE TO ROLE. CLARK SUFFERS BADLY IN COMPARISON. NEW, YOUNG AND UNTESTED, HE SIMPLY STRIKES THE VOTER AS IRRELEVANT IN THE LEVESQUE/TRUDEAU BREAK INTO THE ACTION WITH SOME DRAMATIC, NEW PROPOSALS BUT DRAMA IS NOT STRONG SUIT OF CLARK, WHO IS CAUTIOUS BY NATURE.

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4. BUILDING A CREDIBLE LEADERSHIP IMAGE FOR CLARK WILL BE AT LEAST AS DIFFICULT. AS INDICATED IN REF C, CLARK IS AN ORGANIZER NOT A SPELLBINDER. HE IS NOT AN EXCITING PERSONALITY PHYSICALLY OR ORALLY. HIS TOP POLITICAL ADVISOR TOLD EMBOFFS THAT MEDIA KEPT INSISTING THAT CLARK DO BATTLE WITH TRUDEAU. PCS HAVE BEEN RESISTING THIS CHALLENGE, HE SAID, BECAUSE "WE DON'T HAVE A TRUDEAU AND IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO TRY TO BUILD ONE" WITH CLARK. PC PROBLEM IS THAT CANADIAN ELECTORATE, AS MEASURED BY POLLS, APPEARS TO SHARE MEDIA DESIRE FOR ANOTHER TRUDEAU.

5. ALTHOUGH IMMEDIATE FUTURE IS BLEAK FOR CLARK AND THE PCS, THEY ARE NOT WITHOUT SOME GROUNDS FOR OPTIMISM. FIRST, CLARK IS COOL BY NATURE AND EXPERIENCED POLITICALLY DESPITE HIS AGE. HE CLEARLY WILL NOT PANIC ON BASIS OF A FEW POLL RESULTS. SECOND, CLARK IS A SUPERB ORGANIZER AND HAS SPENT BETTER PART OF LAST YEAR VISITING AND ORGANIZING RIDINGS (DISTRICTS) ACROSS CANADA. REPORTEDLY, HE HAS IN PLACE GENERALLY YOUNG AND AGGRESSIVE POLITICAL

OPERATORS IN MANY OF THESE AND PREPARATIONS COMING ALONG
WELL FOR CHOICE OF STRONG CANDIDATES. WHILE
IT IS TRUE THAT NATIONAL LEADER IS VERY IMPORTANT FACTOR
IN CANADIAN NATIONAL ELECTIONS, QUALITIES OF LOCAL
CANDIDATES BY NO MEANS IRRELEVANT. AT THIS PARTICULAR
TIME, PCS LOOK LIKE NO MATCH IN FORMER REGARD BUT THEY
COULD WELL BE UNUSUALLY STRONG IN LATTER REGARD.

6. IN SUM, ADDING PLUSSES AND MINUSES TOGETHER, CON-
CLUSION INESCAPABLE THAT CLARK AND PCS DEFINITELY ON
DOWNSIDE AND THINGS ALMOST CERTAIN TO GET WORSE BEFORE
THEY IMPROVE. BOTH TURNAROUND POLLS WERE TAKEN BEFORE

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FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2933
INFO AMCONSUL MONTREAL
ALL OTHER AMCONSULS CANADA (BY POUCH)

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 OTTAWA 02009

WELL-RECEIVED TRUDEAU SPEECH IN WASHINGTON AND MOST HERE
EXPECT THAT LIBERALS WILL ADD SIGNIFICANTLY TO SIX POINT
LEAD THEY NOW HAVE. ENDERS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
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Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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